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Use of the Context in Interpretation.—In the employment of the context as a means of interpretation, two errors have been committed, the one through negligence, and the other through exaggeration.

1. *Negligence.*—The context, the natural and logical resource of the interpreter, has neither been sufficiently appreciated nor employed. This help, although being of great use, possesses no especial attraction to certain minds, since it does not conduct to brilliant and unlooked-for results. Other resources, such as the parallels, the etymology, and archæology, are very frequently preferred, as affording scope for ingenuity.

2. *Exaggeration.*—Sometimes, on the other hand, too much importance has been given to the context. Generally the dogmatical school has fallen into the error of negligence, while exaggeration is predicable of the rationalistic school. The influence of the context in revealing the true sense is evidently proportionate to the harmony of ideas throughout the whole passage. The extent of this harmony, however, changes according to the nature of the writings, and frequently according to the character of the authors. The context is neither so connected nor so extended in a poetical, historical, or sententious, as in a didactic or oratorical passage. What context, other than the parallelism, is there from the tenth to the twenty-ninth chapter of Proverbs? The One-hundred-and-nineteenth Psalm, being purely alphabetical, presents as little context. It would therefore be absurd to proceed in the interpretation of this Psalm, as in that of the Fiftieth Psalm, which forms a complete whole, carefully elaborated and closely united. In the Prophets context is often evident and important, but of no great extent. The specialties, the variations, the sudden transitions peculiar to the prophetic writings, render the employment of the context much less useful there than elsewhere.

This is where the rationalistic interpretations have erred, when they have contested, in particular, the Messianic sense of the prophetic writings, and their predictive sense in general. Reasoning as they have been accustomed to do in the didactic works, they have denied the Messianic sense, even the evident oracles, because the preceding verses were engaged with other subjects. This is a pure *petitio principii*. They have denied the prophecy because they did not discover in it the characteristics which they preconceived to be necessary to a prophecy.

The interpreter who wishes to explain a word or phrase by the aid of the context, should first of all determine the limits of the context. He should endeavor to comprehend the full sense and the general bond of union of the passage, seeking not the brilliant and ingenious interpretation, but the correct sense and the natural connection.

This done, he will still be cautious, remembering that he may have arrived only at a probability of truth. In order to verify his conclusions he should repeat his labor, weighing each word, comparing the several details, taking account of the preference given by the author to each expression and each figure, until a complete harmony has been established between the different elements of the context and the context itself, between the context and the text, between the lesser parts and the whole. The conclusions thus attained should be further verified by an appeal to the other resources of Hermeneutics.—*Elliott & Harsha.*